DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 557 CS 003 764

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TITLE Report on Phase I (Interest, Comprehension, & Readability) Prepublication Learner Verification of "Reading Basics Plus," Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
INSTITUTION Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Nov 75
NOTE 12p.; See related documents ED 142 935 and CS 003 765

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Reading; Comprehension; Interest; Intermediate Grades; *Readability; Reading Level; *Reading Materials; *Textbook Preparation; *Textbook Research; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

"Reading Basics Plus" consists of an integrated set of texts, workbooks, duplicating masters, word cards, charts, and teacher's guidebooks. By a process of small group trials, students' and teachers' reactions to the proposed content of the "Reading Basics Plus" program for grades four, five, and six were obtained in order to provide editors and contributors with information about interest level, readability, comprehensibility, and vocabulary in the proposed selections. Results indicated that pupil interest in the material was high and that the level of reading difficulty of the material was appropriate for the grades for which it was designed. In addition, detailed information was gathered regarding specific difficult words in the proposed selections. This information was used in the development of glossaries and teacher's editions for the program. (Author/GW)

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Report on Phase I (Interest, Comprehension, & Readability)

Prepublication Learner Verification of

Reading Basics Plus

Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

November, 1975

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INTRODUCTION

Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. is publishing a developmental reading program in 1976 called Reading Basics Plus. Acting as contributors to this program are Dolores R. Amato, A. Dickson Carroll, Cherie A. Clodfelter, Lynette Saine Gaines, Eric P. Hamp, Phillip L. Harris, Joseph A. Lucero, and Mattie Claybrook Williams. The program spans the traditional grades of kindergarten through sixth grade in a series of six levels. In final published form, Reading Basics Plus consists of an integrated set of texts, workbooks, duplicating masters, word cards, charts, and teacher's guide books. Other Harper & Row publications supplement, but are not part of the developmental-reading sequence of Reading Basics Plus.

The first phase of prepublication learner verification was an effort to gain student and teacher reaction to the proposed content of the level D-F (4th - 6th grade) texts. Contributors and editors needed information regarding the interest level, ease of comprehension, readability, general appropriateness, and vocabulary of the proposed selections.

THE STUDY

Each of the three books (level D, E, and F) is divided into five collections. Typewritten copies of the proposed collections were made available for the study. No art was available for the selections. With the aid of our Sales Representatives, a group of from three to five schools was obtained to try each of the collections.

In most cases, a given school was used with one collection from each of the three levels. The schools in each group were selected to provide a good small-scale sample of urban, suburban and rural backgrounds. Community size and location were controlled and each sample used schools from a widespread geographic area. Schools helping in this study were located in Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Except in the preliminary trials, in each school a teacher at the appropriate level was asked to have "a representative group of five students" from one class read the selections in a collection, answer on an attached sheet certain comprehension questions provided for each selection, and rate each selection by indicating whether they liked the selection very much, some, or not at all. After the students read and responded to a selection, the teacher was asked to discuss the material with the students, using the comprehension questions as a guide. On the basis of that discussion and the teacher's personal reading of the material, each teacher was asked to rate the group of sample students on their overall reading ability, their interest in the selection, and the readability or "reading difficulty level" of the story. The teachers were also asked to provide information on the time it took the students to read the material. The three ratings were done on one-to-five scales: low to high for the ability and difficulty questions, and poor to excellent for the interest question. An exhibit of the rating sheet can be found at the end of this report.

Teachers were also asked to provide a list of specific words, if there were any, that gave the children difficulty. This list helped our editors and contributors in the development of teacher edition materials. Teachers could develop such a list either from listening to the student read the selection orally, or by asking

the students to keep track of words they had trouble with during their silent reading of the selection.

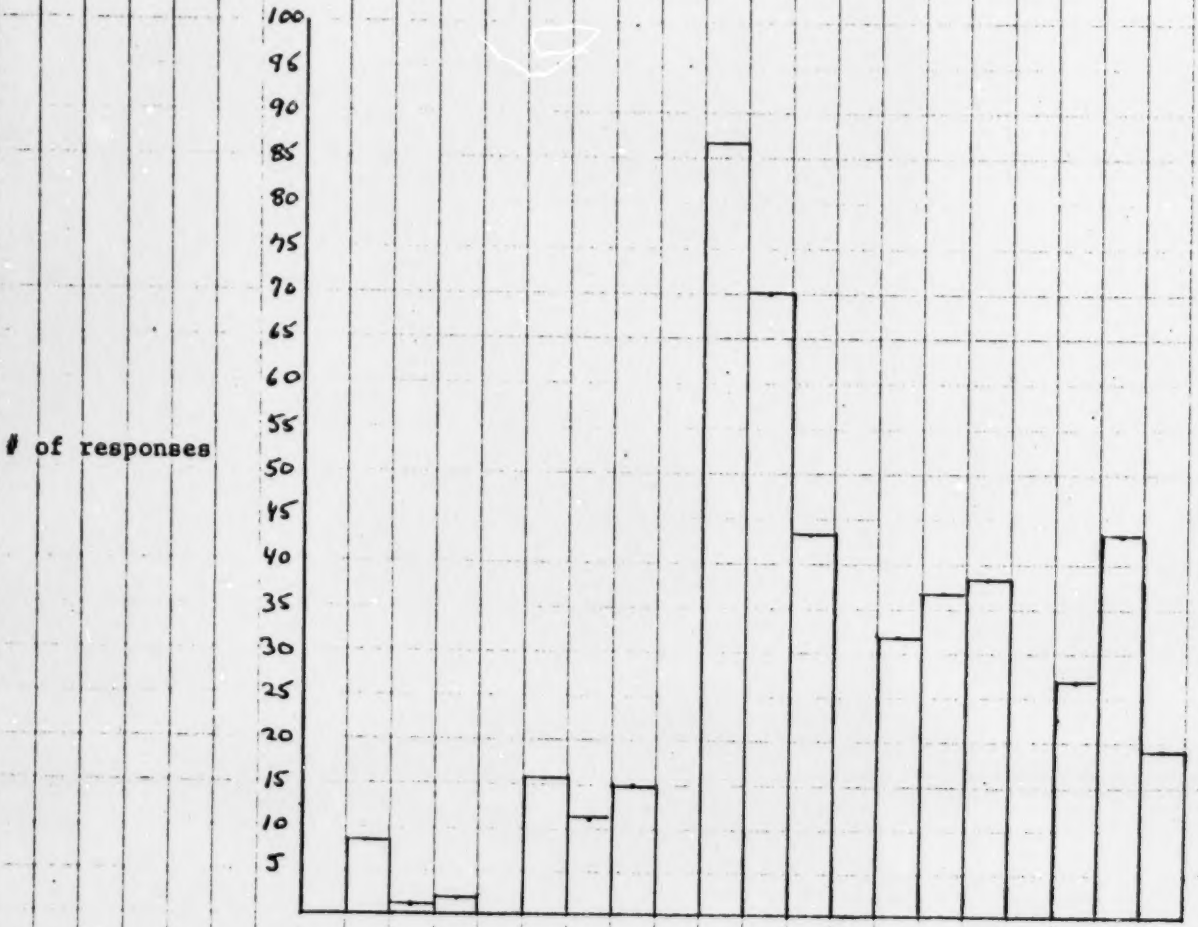
The teacher questionnaire also asked teachers if there were any parts of the material that were "offensive, embarrassing, or inappropriate for students" and, in another question, asked them for any comments they would like to make: likes, dislikes, other difficulties, etc.

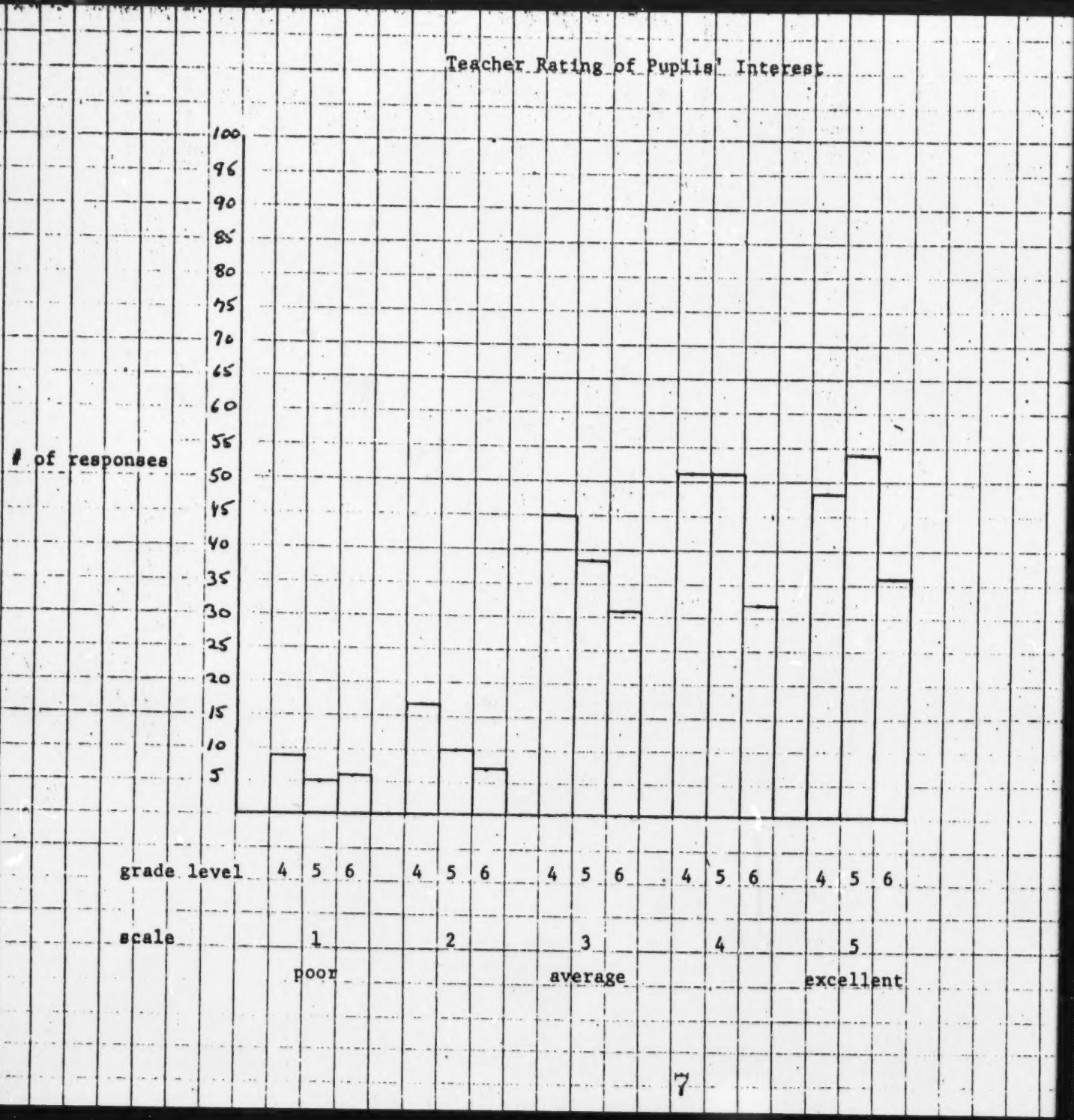
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Charts 1, 2, and 3. which follow, show the composite results of the teachers' rating of the selections by grade level of the three books. The ratings were based on the following questions: "How would you characterize the overall reading ability of your group? (Chart 1) How would you characterize this story with respect to pupils' interest? (Chart 2) How would you characterize this story with respect to reading difficulty level for your group?" (Chart 3) Since these are composite ratings of all the different selections in a given level, each teacher indicated the ability of the group being used for each selection. The composition of the group might change from selection to selection. For example, at grade five, the fourth collection contained eight selections so each reporting teacher had to indicate the ability of eight groups. As a result, there may be a total of 150 responses to a question at one grade level, based on the responses of from 20 to 25 teachers.

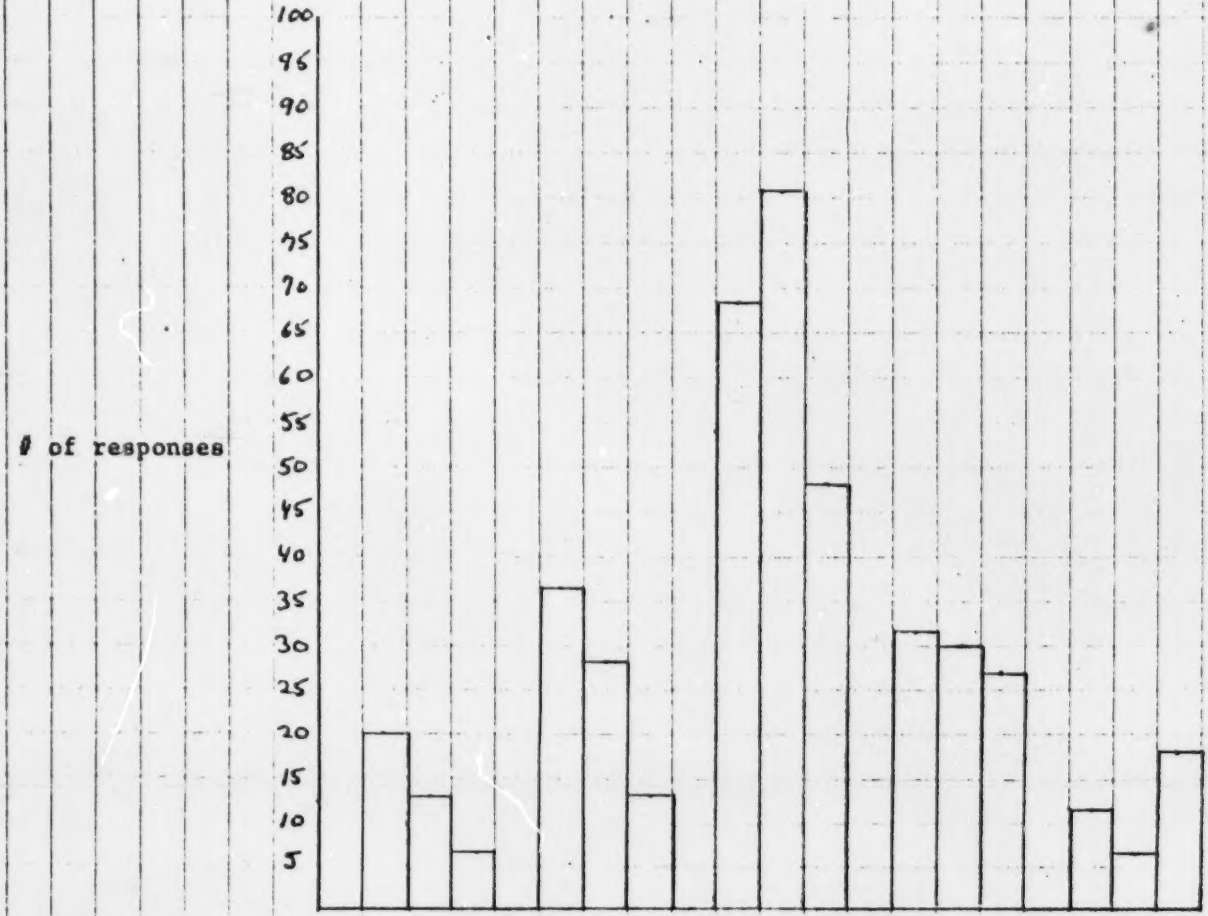
After our asking for the use of a representative group of students, it may be noticed that the teachers tended, by their own later rating, to use groups that were in more cases above level than below level. This is particularly noticeable in

Teacher Rating of Pupil Ability




Teacher Rating of Pupils' Interest
# of responses
100
95
90
85
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
grade level 4 5 6 4 5 6 4 5 6 4 5 6 4 5 6
scale 1 2 3 4 5
poor
average
excellent

Teacher Rating of "Readability"



the sixth-grade sample. This very human tendency did not seem so great as to significantly affect the results obtained.

Our contributors and editors were gratified at the strong favorable response to the selections that showed up in teachers' rating of pupils' interest, as indicated on Chart 2. The high interest level of the material also showed in the students' own rating of the material, which will be discussed later.

Since the selections were chosen and edited with the objective of matching reading difficulty with the reading level of average students, Chart 3 shows a very satisfactory result. Specific selections, of course, rated above and below the average. This information made a specific contribution to our editorial effort and is considered proprietary in nature.

As mentioned previously, from one to three comprehension questions were asked of the students after they had read the selections, but before any group discussion took place. This was to provide a quick check on the comprehension of the students, the success of which reinforced the validity of selection time, interest and readability results. No teaching of the comprehension skills took place in this phase of the learner verification study [see the Report of Phase II (Skills) Prepublication Learner Verification Reading Basics Plus for teaching results.] Totalling correct and incorrect responses for the various grades provided the following results: 4th grade, 84% correct - 16% incorrect; 5th grade, 88% correct - 12% incorrect; 6th grade, 81% correct - 19% incorrect. The students were, in general, reading with understanding. An area for future study could be the nature (skill area) of the comprehension question errors.

In response to the question, "How much did you like this story? very much, some, or not at all," a minimum of 92% of the responses were positive--either "very much" or "some." The results totalling all the selections at a given grade level were: 4th grade, 68% very much, 26% some, and 6% not at all; 5th grade, 66% very much, 26% some, and 8% not at all; 6th grade, 63% very much, 29% some, and 8% not at all. Two things that are particularly striking about these results are their consistency from level to level and the high proportion of responses in the "very much" category.

A similar question was not asked of the teachers, but the request for comments from teachers elicited many statements regarding how the children liked or did not like a selection, along with much other helpful information. The proportion of these positive and negative teacher comments was tallied with certain of the selections and matched well with the students' responses. Judging whether a comment was positive or negative was rather subjective, so no data are presented here.

In a related area, it was expected that there was a correlation between students' success with a selection and their response to the question of how much they liked the story. Some selections with a somewhat larger-than-normal number of errors on the comprehension quiz were studied with the chi-square test applied to a contingency table of comprehension test scores versus the responses to the how-much-liked question. No significant results were obtained though a tendency was observable.*

* Selections with a somewhat larger-than-normal number of errors were used because in most cases, errors were too few to provide a reasonable number of "made-an-error" cases.

One type of data that proved especially helpful to the editors and contributors cannot be summarized in any statistical fashion. Information on the words causing difficulty was used by editors and contributors in developing teacher's guide materials. The glossographers also used the difficult-word lists in their work of building useful glossaries for each book.

SUMMARY

By a process of small group trials, student and teacher reaction to the proposed content of the intermediate levels of Reading Basics Plus was obtained that provided editors and contributors with useful information about the interest level, readability, comprehensibility and vocabulary in the proposed selections. Results, in general, indicated that pupil interest in the material was high and that it was on grade level with respect to reading difficulty.

In addition, detailed information was developed regarding specific difficult words in the proposed selections. This information was used extensively in the development of glossaries and teacher's editions for Reading Basics Plus.

PERSON TO CONTACT FOR CLARIFICATION, MORE DETAIL, OR UPDATED INFORMATION:

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TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix I

Title of Selection _____ Date _____

Name of Teacher _____

School _____ Telephone (include area code) _____

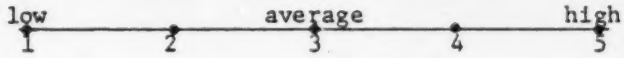
Street _____

City _____ State or Province _____ Zip Code _____

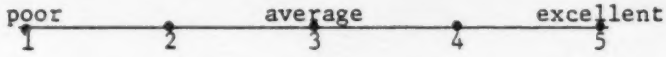
Grade Level _____ Number of Students _____

Type of Instruction (Open, Individualized, Group, etc.) _____

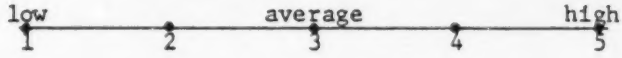
1. How would you characterize the overall reading ability of your group?



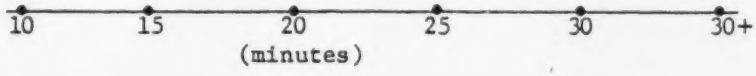
2. How would you characterize pupils' interest in this selection?



3. How would you characterize the reading difficulty level of the selection?



4. What was the average time it took your group to read this story?



5. Please list specific words, if any, that gave children difficulty.

6. Were there any parts of the selection that were offensive, embarrassing, or inappropriate for students? If so, please give details.

7. Comments (likes, dislikes, other difficulties, etc.)

(Use reverse side for items 6 and 7 for more space)